(h) and (i) Delegations from Mauritius at different levels visit India at regular intervals to promote bilateral cooperation in various areas. This is an ongoing process. There is no information about any proposal of a high level delegation from Mauritius to visit India in the near future.

Lobby to safeguard Indian interest in America

3143. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India sacked Akin Gump Strauss Haur and Feld of USA for failing to lobby effectively against the sale of F-16s to Pakistan by USA;

(b) if so, whether India has appointed any other lobby firm to safeguard its interest in USA; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) The contract of the lobbying firm M/sAkin Gump, Strauss, Hauer and Feld LLP expired on 30 September, 2004 and was not renewed.

(b) and (c) The appointment of another lobbying firm to advance India's interests in the US Congress would follow a detailed analysis of past results and an assessment of future objectives.

Economic Diplomacy with Pakistan

3144. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have given emphasis to economic diplomacy and co-operation with Pakistan;

(b) the details of business propositions which have been discussed with Pakistan;

(c) whether it is a fact that the Indian High Commission has been asked to do the follow up on all such diplomacy;

(d) whether a special officer would be appointed in our High Commission in Pakistan to supervise all on-going problems and matters with Pakistan; and

(e) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (b) Economic and Commercial Cooperation with Pakistan is high on the Government's agenda. As part of the Composite Dialogue with Pakistan, Commerce Secretaries level meeting on Economic and Commercial Cooperation was held on August 11-12,2004, in Islamabad where both sides discussed trade related issues. Several proposals were put forth by the Indian Commerce Secretary to his counterpart in the areas of Trade promotion, Trade routes, Business Interactions, Telecommunications, Civil Aviation, etc.

On the margins of the Fourth SAARC Commerce Ministers Meeting in Islamabad held on 22-23 November, 2004, it was decided to form a Joint Study Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation. The Joint Study Group met from February 22-23 in New Delhi and held detailed discussions on promotion of trade and economic cooperation for mutual benefits of both countries. The two sides identified issues relating to bilateral trade and deliberated upon the future roadmap in order to enhance trade and economic cooperation. In this meeting, we also brought in our agenda of bilateral cooperation such as identification of trade items, opening of trade and transit points, opening of branches of banks, trade exhibitions and other interactions between business and entrepreneur communities in both countries.

(c) to (e) Indian High Commission follows up on all matters of concern to India, including economic and commercial issues. The Indian High Commission also has an officer who looks after economic and commerce related matters.

Fishing boats captured by Pakistan

3145. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian fishing boats presently under the control of Pakistan;

(b) whether our embassy has been able to secure their release in the last six months;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether Government have plans to persuade Pakistan that seizure of Indian fishing boats is against accepted forms of international relations in the present day world; and